



# CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN HERITAGE

Impact in rural areas

Council of Europe – Strategy 21

**WORKSHOP** summary



The richness of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the rural areas in Europe is extraordinary, but it is clearly threatened by phenomena such as depopulation and globalization.

The transformation of ways of life in recent decades has generated not only the abandonment or destruction of items of material heritage, but also the disappearance of the link through which, generation after generation, have shared and kept the knowledge, values and stories that make up that intangible heritage, with the consequent loss of important elements of the material heritage and collective memory impairment.

Moreover, the emergence of the phenomenon of cultural tourism, among others, has led to a reformulation of the image of the rural world by urban society full of clichés and far from the daily reality of thousands of towns that are not meant to be an idyllic place stuck in time, but struggling to occupy the space that they deserve in the new society of the 21st century.

In this context, cultural heritage in the rural world sometimes is seen as a problem, since it lacks sufficient resources for its conservation, and in others as a poorly understood business opportunity, that empties it of its values and its essential meaning and tries to fossilize it in an ideal and unreal past.

Quoting Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins, Coordinator for the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of the Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), "Cultural Heritage is not just about the past, but to the continuity of shared values, the preservation of differences and the respect for what is proper to us". Therefore, to care for cultural heritage is to keep this legacy alive, in constant dialogue with the present and as a responsible, participatory and inclusive exercise of citizenship.

Taking into account the above, the formulation of appropriate cultural policies based on the coordination of the public and the private sector is essential. Through these policies, people and democratic values become the point of reference and engine for making cultural heritage a solution for some of the social, economic, political and cultural challenges facing the rural environment in the twenty-first century. In this context, Strategy 21 becomes a fundamental tool since it gives us the right framework to reformulate policies related to cultural heritage in rural areas.

In this document we present several cultural projects that have been developed in small rural towns of Spain, Italy and Portugal following the integrated approach proposed by Strategy 21. They are a clear example of the effectiveness of this new approach to cultural heritage inspired





by the Faro Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005).

In all the projects, people are the basis to define actions in the cultural heritage and this is conceived as a common good, that is alive, in a continuous process of change, created, recreated, abandoned and even destroyed and again recovered and reinvented in a movement that does not cease. Each case study exemplifies the application of some of the recommendations to address the challenges of the three priority components:

- The promotion of social participation and good governance;
- The sustainability of local and regional economic and territorial development;
- The contribution of research and training to increase knowledge and education.

The Patrimoni Project which forms part of the University Extension Programme (PEU) at the Jaume I University of Castellón is an example of how to address the challenges of the social component working in a network of heritage communities.

This project was hatched by a group of local communities in the interior of the province of Castellón, which were developing projects

related to cultural heritage, such as how to recover wine culture, the socialisation of dry stone heritage, or of the ecological and traditional knowledge related to the exploitation of water. At a given time, these groups, aware of their limitations, asked the University to put together spaces for the sharing of practices and experiences. Regarding this need the university created the heritage project to support the work of those heritage communities both in the short and long term and offer training, technical support and places to meet and share ideas, knowledge and experiences.

The main idea that drives these communities is that one of the most important and urgent social and cultural challenges facing rural areas is to redefine and widen the very concept of heritage culture as a social cohesive element for people, based on the creation of feelings of belonging and responsibility. In this framework, the heritage community manifests itself as a necessary space from which to imagine alternative models and systems for social development, innovation and creativity around heritage, initiated from bottom to top and continued in time. A place where citizens are involved in the heritage process from the beginning, evolving the concept of participation towards more active and decisive proposals for the taking of decisions.

In Fontecchio (Italy), one of the most suitable options to foster territorial and economic development has been the establishment of a community cooperative aiming to improve the quality of life and increasing job and business opportunities for residents.

Fontecchio is a small village of about 400 inhabitants that experienced a severe emigration in post-World War II and a progressive impoverishment both from a social and an economic perspective, like many other villages in the area. In 2009, it suffered the consequences of the massive earthquake in the area of the city of L'Aquila.

One main issue was the loss of all tangible references for communities, a loss of identity and memory that deeply influenced the way and the quality of life. The Aterno Valley is now dotted with construction sites that are slowly returning to local communities their collective space and symbols. The re-appropriation of cultural heritage has meant a real sign of social cohesion and brotherhood, such as for the restored San Bernardino church in 2015, as well as the Collemaggio Basilica in 2017, two symbols of the city of L'Aquila.

New technologies are mainly developed in the restoration sector because of the amount of heritage sites damaged in 2009; this work is bringing to light a hidden heritage that is

rewriting history and will need funding to develop suitable procedures and tools to protect and interpret the past and the present history of the area.

The Cooperative and the associations in Fontecchio are indeed working on community-based projects like rural markets or rural heritage walks, to encourage the use of heritage and traditional practices, first of all to recreate a social fabric able to rebuild the economy.

In Grândola, Portugal, private and public initiative joined together in the year 2000 to retrieve the Lousal mining identity, through a project focused on research and training to increase knowledge and education in order to conserve knowledge, techniques and processes related to industrial heritage.

Lousal is a small village of 600 inhabitants located in the Alentejo region, whose mining activity had ceased in the 1990s. At that time there were only 300 workers and 700 inhabitants who brought memories, stories and collective identity from the mine.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, using the extensive and valuable heritage of the mine and the resilience of 600 people, the Lousal was reborn. Amongst several projects, we can highlight the Live Science Centre, the Electric Power Station Museum, the mining





path and the Tunnel Valdemar. Under the motto “Exploring Science – Extracting Knowledge”, heritage is combined with high-level scientific dissemination studying “Where”, “How” and “Why”. In spaces with science, art, crafts and labour knowledge, visiting the past and projecting the future happens under the shelter of tradition and the promise of days to come.

Through the engines of the Electric Power Station Museum, the arid ground of the mining path and the darkness of the Tunnel Valdemar, it is possible to go back in time and feel the mining life. Meanwhile, the hands-on experiences of the Live Science Centre, the interaction with monitors in different areas of science and the participation in scientific lectures with university professors, points toward the future.

The ACCVL (Associação Centro Ciência Viva do Lousal - Live Science Association) has become the main local employer, helping to maintain or even bring new highly qualified people into the community. Thirty to forty percent of kids in the nursery schools are children of workers in the CCVL. Some other businesses, mostly the

snack-bar type, opened after the beginning of the CCVL activities. Also the real estate sector gained a new momentum in the purchasing, selling and renting business, both in Lousal and in the nearest village - Ermidas do Sado.

A very complex challenge in rural areas is to ensure that young people identify with the culture and lifestyle of their territory, to raise awareness of the values conveyed by heritage among them, and to encourage them to participate in cultural projects in their local community. We must create tools and establish spaces that encourage young people to become involved in the cultural life of their municipalities. The main tools to deal with this are education and training.

In this regard, the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage (DGPC) together with the Directorate General of Education in Portugal have been promoting, for nine consecutive editions, an annual contest for students from primary to secondary education to enhance knowledge about the value of cultural heritage and its preservation, and the importance of national

monuments and museums. The initiative consists in the elaboration of creative works in the form of writing, visual arts, performing arts, photography, video and multimedia.

In order to encourage the identification of citizens, especially the young, with their cultural heritage, the DGPC has been working since 2012 on the development of a digital platform on archaeological heritage that allows both professionals and the public to access information about archaeological sites and works - Archaeologist's Portal (<http://arqueologia.patrimoniocultural.pt/>).

In the same line, the Portuguese Museums Network, founded in 2000, has promoted the sharing of knowledge and training between national, regional and local museums, indirectly contributing to the socio-cultural and economic development of the regions where they are located. The DGPC promotes training on heritage education and educational services in museums which includes online contents every year.


Sport and outdoor activities promoting an integrated approach to history, folklore, biodiversity and local ecosystems also work as important means for raising awareness for natural and cultural values. Some municipalities in Portugal, such as Sesimbra, offer mountain biking activities in the Natural Park of Arrábida - Serra do Risco, connecting ancient pilgrimage routes with archaeological heritage and natural landscape – Pelas Terras do Risco.

In Spain, la Fundación San Millán de la Cogolla (La Rioja, Spain) has implemented a heritage education project in the World Heritage Site of the Monasteries of Suso and Yuso, that considers people not merely as onlookers, but also as actors and carers of the cultural and natural heritage. The key players in this programme are children and young people.

Every year over 3 000 students from throughout Spain participate in the heritage workshops to discover stories, traditional knowledge, lifestyles and beliefs related to this cultural landscape. In addition, 15 children from the rural school in this area (with only 300 inhabitants) receive special training related to heritage and, during 2018-2019, will participate in the European project Heritage Hubs. This is an international heritage education project, led by The National Association for Heritage Education in Finland and funded by the Creative Europe programme, whose aim is to promote cultural exchanges between young people from Spain, Finland and Serbia, using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The Fundación San Millán supports cultural and creative industries as a way of boosting the economy in the rural world. Through the artists in residence, the project seeks to transmit a positive, realistic image of the rural world to encourage young people to return to the countryside. And the grant called Cultural Tourism Entrepreneurship tries to attract young talent to apply ICT for projects of responsible, sustainable tourism.





The Foundation also encourages the active participation of the locals in the cultural life of the community and in caring for and disseminating the cultural and natural heritage. In this way, it has promoted the creation of a network of heritage communities integrated by several municipalities whose first common project has been the organisation of the European Heritage Days 2018 on its territory.

From the case studies presented, we can say that it has become a movement at a European level that values cultural heritage as an opportunity to meet the challenges of the 21st century and to promote sustainable development in rural areas. There are working groups composed of universities, local communities, public administrations, and museums that have launched projects based on a holistic vision of cultural heritage aimed at promoting the social, economic and culture development of a territory. The main motor of all these projects is the participation of civil society and local authorities. However, to get the citizens and local authorities to participate in cultural projects in the rural environment is not easy due to political, economic and training issues.

In this sense, we consider education and training to be the starting point for preparing responsible and committed citizens, who respect cultural diversity and are willing to engage in projects that promote the economic, social and cultural development of rural areas. Faced with this situation, Strategy 21 is, for all of us, an essential tool to give continuity, to renew and to improve our projects as well as to explain to society in general the role and meaning of cultural heritage in today's world.

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**Strategy 21** redefines the place and role of cultural heritage in Europe providing guidelines to promote good governance and participation in heritage identification and management. It encourages innovative approaches to improving the environment and quality of life of European citizens.



\*\*\* This Strategy 21 Workshop summary has been prepared and collected by group lead expert, **Ms Mariola Andonegui Navarro** for the Council of Europe. The views expressed in this document are those of its author and not necessarily those of the Council of Europe.



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